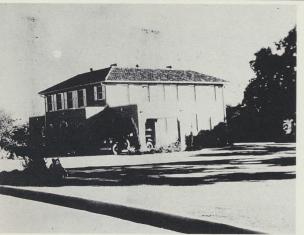
# IMMIE RODGERS 1929

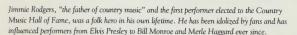
ON THE WAY UP

1929

"ON THE WAY UP,

JIMMIE RODGERS





Original sessions produced by Ralph Peer.
Compilation and annotation by Nolan Porterfield.
Transfers from the original metal parts by Bernardo Cosachov.
Mastered by Jörg Siemer.

Final reissue production by Richard Weize for Bear Family Records and Rounder Records.

Licensed from RCA Records, a label of BMG Music.





Blue Yodeler's Paradise, Kerrville, Texas

- . High Powered Mama 2:56
- . Tuck Away My Lonesome Blues 2:51
- 3. Frankie and Johnny 2:51
- . Frankie and Johnny 2:50
- 5. I'm Sorry We Met 2:17
- 6. Train Whistle Blues 2:57
- 7. Everybody Does It in Hawaii 2:49
- 8. Jimmie's Texas Blues 2:46
- 9. Home Call 2:33
- 9. **Home Call** 2:33
- 10. Blue Yodel No. 6 3:05
- 11. Yodeling Cowboy 3:11
- 12. My Rough and Rowdy Ways 2:31
- 13. The Land of My Boyhood Dreams 2:33
- 14. The Land of My Boyhood Dreams 2:45
- 15. Whisper Your Mother's Name 3:23
- 16. I've Ranged, I've Roamed, I've Travelled 2:49
- 17. Hobo Bill's Last Ride 2:38

the bulk of Jimmie Rodgers' recorded output for -perhaps the most active and productive twelve months in a career that would soon be shortened by illness and the economic downturn set off by the Wall Street Crash in October of that year.

The previous fall Rodgers had headlined a major vaudeville bill playing Loew's "Southern Time" in the larger cities of the South—Atlanta, Memphis, New Orleans, and Houston. Now, in early 1929, he left the bright lights and big cities to join the Paul English Players, a travelling repertoire company playing under canvas. The venues were smaller—Mobile, Gulfport, Jackson, Vicksburg, and the like—but Rodgers was paid a reported \$600 a week and given star billing as the "Extra Added Concert Attraction," performing only twenty minutes each night.

Featuring a solo recording artist as headliner was a departure for "tent rep," which was generally known for down-home dramas, tearjerkers, and three-act farces. But Rodgers was on native ground, and crowds turned out to see the local boy making good; within a week the show's owner reported that business had doubled and he was about to jack admission prices.

This lasted until the tour reached Meridian, Mississippi, Rodgers' hometown. For some time he'd been nursing a bad cold, which of course aggravated his ever-present tubercular condition. Lemon and honey, washed down with a big shot of rye before the show, kept him in voice; audiences saw only the jaunty Jimmie Rodgers, grinning and mugging as he hauled out a wire-backed drugstore chair and his favorite Martin guitar, propped up his foot, and launched into one of his famous Blue Yodels. After four days of the one-week stand, Rodgers, further weakened by a round of promotional appearances and the excitement of being back home, went down to the lot for the evening show, collapsed in his dressing

room, and had to be replaced (his stand-in was young Bill Bruner, a Meridian messenger boy who'd studied Rodgers' every lick and did a very reasonable facsimile).

Undaunted, Rodgers was on his feet the next day, and soon he was off to New York for a series of recording sessions stretching over three strenuous days. Two titles included here are from those sessions—"High Powered Mama," among the best of Rodgers' hard-driving, lowdown blues tunes, and "I'm Sorry We Met," a solidly-crafted love ballad revived by other country artists through the years.

From New York Rodgers traveled to Kerrville, Texas, where he decided to build a home. He had signed with RKO Interstate for a new vaudeville tour that summer, but the starting date was some weeks away. Ever restless and eager to be on the go, he scheduled a barnstorming trip across the South Plains of Texas, working solo appearances on his way to Oklahoma, where the RKO tour opened. In May he began his longest and most imposing vaudeville run, from the middle of May to the end of July and covering a dozen cities from Tulsa down through Texas, across to Little Rock and Birmingham, ending in Atlanta. From there it was back to Dallas for four arduous days of recording in a makeshift studio set up by Ralph Peer in the ballroom of the lefferson Hotel.

From these sessions came two of Rodgers' finest blues performances, the rousing "Jimmie's Texas Blues" and "Train Whistle Blues," with a group of cafe musicians he had run across in Dallas. They were the Burkes brothers, Billy and Weldon, and Joe Kaipo, the enigmatic steel guitarist from Hawaii, whose work enhances both of these sides. "Train Whistle Blues" also features Rodgers' vocalized "steam whistle" that wowed his stage audiences.

The more conventional harmony whistling on "Tuck Away My Lonesome Blues" is by Bob MacGimsey,

who held the title of National Champion Whistler and was billed as "the only man in the world who can whistle three tones at once," as he does here. Rodgers went solo for his own rollicking version of that perennial barroom favorite, "Frankie and Johnny," which he often used as a signature tune in personal appearances. Also heard here is the previously unissued Take 1, which has, if anything, more energy and sparkle than the issued version. It was probably passed over because of a ragged spot here and there; clearly Rodgers was still smoothing out the lyrics to fit his own unique sense of timing.

The entire group was assembled for "Everybody Does It in Hawaii," a clever bit of fluff that was one of Rodgers' first forays into the mildly risque (oddly enough, it was written by his sister-in-law, Elsie McWilliams, who would not put her name on even milder material she authored because "I've always been mighty straitlaced"). In a review that for indignation and silliness outdoes even present-day guardians of musical morality, the trade paper Variety huffed that "dealers should use discrimination and not sell "Everybody Does It in Hawaii" to polite families or for juvenile consumption."

Three takes of "Home Call" closed out these sessions, but none of the takes was issued until the 1960's, when the corniest of them, featuring a musical saw, surfaced on a LP. The present collection offers Take 3, with only Rodgers and Kaipo, sans saw. It's a pleasant complement to the original 78 r.p.m. version (from a solo session in 1932, heard on Rounder 1062).

After a haphazard and none-too-successful tour around Texas that fall, Rodgers took Kaipo and the Burkes brothers back to Dallas for more sessions in October, although he used them on only two of the six tunes recorded. All six sides were cut in a single day, resulting in recordings which I have referred to elsewhere as "among Rodgers' least inspired."

Around the time of his move to Texas, Rod had taken to wearing boots and ten-gallon hat, occasionally even donning a pair of wooly chaps. The cowboy image never quite replaced his more famous identity as a railroader, but his fascination with the Old West now led to the recording of a couple of cowboy ditries. Along with such later tunes as "When the Cactus Is In Bloom" (Rounder 1061) and "Prairie Lullaby" (Rounder 1062), "Yodeling Cowboy" and "Land Of My Boyhood Dreams" were to have some impact on the emerging singing-cowboy phenomenon in movies and on records. As elements of Rodgers' repertoire, however, neither of them offers anything out of the ordinary. "Land Of My Boyhood Dreams" is the clearest evidence of mediocrity: thin, listless guitar work, the voice that sounds as if it were merely going through the paces, the occasional slurs ("hastedly" for "hastily," for example), and above all the weak and insipid material. The outtake included here really shows the strain; in the opening bars, Rodgers can't decide whether he wants to do it in 3/4 or 4/4 and almost manages to do both at the same time. But even at his worst, he was still the best thing going.

Another song loosely related to the Western image, "I've Ranged, I've Roamed, and I've Travelled" was so poor that it was held for release until long after Rodgers' death, when RCA was eager to recoup whatever it could from his loyal fans. Although Peer copyrighted the song with composer credit to Rodgers and Elsie McWilliams, it is generally attributed to Goebel Reeves, who recorded it for Okeh four months before Rodgers' version on Victor. "Whisper Your Mother's Name," which has several defects of the mother-song genre and few of its virtues, is only further evidence of the slack in this session.

There are one or two exceptions; the happiest

is "bugh and Rowdy Ways," perhaps the best thing too tom the Rodgers-McWilliams collaboration. In performance it was further enhanced by Joe Kaipo's steel guitar. Another winner is "Blue Yodel No. 6," which, although barely up to the standard of the other Blue Yodels, succeeds on the strength of the form and Rodgers' obvious affection for it.

Young Billy Burkes, who was only seventeen at the time, quickly absorbed Rodgers' guitar style; Jimmie put him on a regular payroll and arranged for him to go to Atlanta for the next recording session, in November, If Victor's files are to be trusted, they stopped along the way in New Orleans to record "Hobo Bill's Last Ride," the song-of-the-road classic written for limmie by Waldo O'Neal. However, there is doubt about where the record was made: Billy Burkes was certain that he never recorded in New Orleans, and even the Victor log agrees that the guitar work on "Hobo Bill's Last Ride"—the bright, mellow lilt that has all the Rodgers trademarks-is actually by Burkes, who had learned not only to copy the style but improved on it. In any event, Billy Burkes soon took over for Rodgers on the guitar, accompanying him on more records than any other musician, and "Hobo Bill's Last Ride" became one of Jimmie Rodgers' most popular hits.

-Nolan Porterfield

Read all about Jimmie Rodgers and his music in Nolan Porterfield's definitive biography, Jimmie Rodgers: The Life and Times of America's Blue Yodeler. Available from The University of Illinois Press, c/o CUP Services, P.O. Box 6525, Ithaca, NY 14851. (Hardcover, 470 pp., discography, many illustrations; \$29.95)



Also available on Rounder Records:

Jimmie Rodgers: First Sessions, 1927-1928, (Volume 1) (Rounder 1056)

Jimmie Rodgers: The Early Years, 1928-1929 (Volume 2) (Rounder 1057)

Jimmie Rodgers: Riding High, 1929-1930 (Volume 4) (Rounder 1059)

Jimmie Rodgers: America's Blue Yodeler, 1930-1931 (Volume 5) (Rounder 1060)

Jimmie Rodgers: Down The Old Road, 1931-1932 (Volume 6) (Rounder 1061)

Jimmie Rodgers: No Hard Times, 1932 (Volume 7) (Rounder 1062)

Jimmie Rodgers: Last Sessions, 1933 (Volume 8)
(Rounder 1063)

#### . High Powered Mama

(Rodgers) 2:56 New York, New York, February 23, 1929 mx BVE 49991-2—Vi 22523 Vocal with own guitar.

#### 2. Tuck Away My Lonesome Blues

(Rodgers-Kaipo-McWilliams) 2:51 Dallas, Texas, August 8, 1929 mx BVE 55308-1—Vi 22220 Vocal, with Billy Burkes, guitar; Joe Kaipo, steel guitar; Weldon Burkes, ukulele; Bob MacGimsey, whistling.

#### 3. Frankie and Johnny

(arr. Rodgers) 2:51 Dallas, Texas, August 10, 1929 mx BVE 55333-2—Vi 22143 Vocal with own guitar.

#### 4. Frankie and Johnny

(arr. Rodgers) 2:50 Dallas, Texas, August 10, 1929 mx BVE 55333-1—unissued Vocal with own guitar.

### 5. I'm Sorry We Met

(Rodgers) 2:17 New York, New York, February 23, 1929 mx BVE 49992-1—Vi 22072 Vocal with own guitar.

#### . Train Whistle Blues

(Rodgers) 2:57
Dallas, Texas, August 8, 1929
mx BVE 55309-2—Vi 22379
Vocal, with Billy Burkes, guitar; Joe Kaipo, steel guitar; Weldon Burkes, ukulele.

#### Everybody Does It in Hawaii

(McWilliams-Rodgers) 2:49 mx Dallas, Texas, August 8, 1929 BVE 55307-2—Vi 22143 Vocal, with Billy Burkes, guitar; Joe Kaipo, steel guitar: Weldon Burkes, ukulele.

#### 8. Jimmie's Texas Blues

(Rodgers) 2:46 Dallas, Texas, August 10, 1929 mx BVE 55332-2—Vi 22379 Vocal, with Billy Burkes, guitar; Joe Kaipo, steel guitar.

#### 9. Home Call

(Rodgers-McWilliams) 2:33 Dallas, Texas, August 12, 1929 mx BVE 55345-3—unissued Vocal with own guitar; Joe Kaipo, steel guitar.

#### 10. Blue Yodel No. 6

(Rodgers) 3:05 Dallas, Texas, October 22, 1929 mx BVE 56453-3—Vi 22271 Vocal with own guitar.

#### 11. Yodeling Cowboy

(Rodgers-McWilliams) 3:11 Dallas, Texas, October 22, 1929 mx BVE 56454-3—Vi 22271 Vocal with own guitar.

#### 12. My Rough and Rowdy Ways

(Rodgers-McWilliams) 2:31 Dallas, Texas, October 22, 1929 mx BVE 56455-1—Vi 22220 Vocal with own guitar; Joe Kaipo, steel guitar.

## The Land of My Boyhood Dreams

(Rodgers) 2:33 Dallas, Texas, October 22, 1929 mx BVE 56450-1—Vi 23811 Vocal, with own guitar.

#### 14. The Land of My Boyhood Dreams

(Rodgers) 2:45 Dallas, Texas, October 22, 1929 mx BVE 56450-3—unissued Vocal, with own guitar.

#### 15. Whisper Your Mother's Name

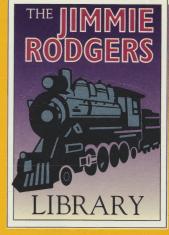
(Rodgers) 3:23 Dallas, Texas, October 22, 1929 mx BVE 56449-3—Vi 22319 Vocal, with Billy Burkes, guitar; Joe Kaipo, steel guitar; Weldon Burkes, ukulele.

# 16. I've Ranged, I've Roamed, I've Travelled (Rodgers-McWilliams) 2:49

Dallas, Texas, October 22, 1929 mx BVE 56456-3—Bb 5892 Vocal, with own guitar.

#### 17. Hobo Bill's Last Ride

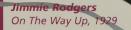
(Waldo O'Neal) 2:38 New Orleans, Louisiana?, November 13, 1929 mx BVE 56528-1—Vi 22421 Vocal with Billy Burkes, guitar.



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Bernardo Cosachov.
Mastered by Jörg Siemer.
Photographs courtesy of Nolan Porterfield.
Design by Scott Billington and Nancy Given.

Special thanks to Ray Mitchell, Robert Nobley, John Stoten, George Tye and Charles K. Wolfe. Final reissue production by Richard Weize for Bear Family Records and Rounder Records.

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